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Murayama-Mahathir

JAPAN UNDERSTANDS EAEC BUT NEEDS MORE TIME TO DECIDE

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KUALA LUMPUR, Aug 27 (Bernama) -- Japanese Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama has said he understands the concept of the Malaysia-initiated East Asia Economic Caucus (EAEC) and stressed the importance for relevant countries to continue to talk over the issue.

Murayama said the Japanese government would continue to study the proposed EAEC, adding that he appreciated Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's effort to explain the EAEC to United States President Bill Clinton during his recent visit to the United States.

This was disclosed by the Deputy Director-General for Public Information, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Kishichiro Amai, when briefing reporters on the meeting between Murayama and Dr Mahathir here today.

Amai said Dr Mahathir told Murayama that Malaysia supported the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) but did not agree that it become an "exclusive economic community".

Elaborating on the EAEC, Dr Mahathir stressed that it was not about the creation of another "trading bloc" but a forum to discuss genuine questions and issues facing East Asian countries, said Amai. -- more

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Dr Mahathir was told that Japan wants to chair next year's APEC summit and it wanted to seek the agreement of member nations to arrange for an official economic summit.

The Malaysian leader also told Murayama that Malaysia would continue its Look East policy and had asked for further Japanese co-operation, said Amai.

In this respect, Malaysia welcomed Japan's commitment to receive more Malaysian students, currently totalling about 2,000, but complained that it was costing the Malaysian government a lot of money due to a strong Yen.

"To overcome this, Dr Mahathir suggested that the Japanese government or its private sector establish schools or training centres in Malaysia, especially in the fields of high-technology," said Amai.

Dr Mahathir also said that Japanese employees in those fields could come to Malaysia to become instructors, which could hasten the process of technology transfer, he said.

The two leaders also discussed the issues of the strong Yen and bilateral trade.

Murayama has assured Dr Mahathir that his government was trying hard to stabilise the currency and admitted that a strong Yen was not always good for Japan. -- more

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Dr Mahathir claimed that the prices of Japanese goods were still high despite the decrease of manufacturing cost in Japan, said Amai.

He said Dr Mahathir also asked Murayama whether Japan could move its production facilities of intermediate products to Malaysia to enable Malaysian manufacturers to buy them at a cheaper price to make manufactured goods.

Japan has also been asked to grant a bigger access to Malaysian products to address the trade imbalance between the two countries which is in Japan's favour.

Murayama, however, reminded Dr Mahathir that the trade pattern over recent months indicated that Malaysia's exports to Japan in terms of manufactured products were on the increase, said Amai.

The Japanese Foreign Ministry diplomat also said Murayama informed Dr Mahathir that the Japanese Chamber of Commerce would organise an import and export promotion throughout the Southeast Asian region in October where discussions over trade imbalance between Malaysia and Japan could be held.

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Dr Mahathir, said Amai, also told his Japanese counterpart that he (Mahathir) "would not recommend Malaysians to ask the Japanese government for compensation regarding Japan's wartime crimes".

Alluding to the "comfort women" issue - the term was never brought up during their talks - Dr Mahathir said the issue of compensation would lead to people asking about what should be done to crimes committed 100 or 200 years ago when Malaysia was under colonial rule, said the Japanese official.

Dr Mahathir stressed that Japan should not dwell too much on the past but should look to the future, based on present relations with its Asian neighbours.

"The Malaysian prime minister also expressed support for Japan's entry into the United Nations Security Council and urged Japan to play a more active role for peace and stability in Asia," said Amai. -- Bernama

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